

University of Technology Sydney
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors

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of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 2018

Certificate of original authorship

I, Jonathan Jones, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Mumala-dhi bunga-ny nguwan-gu.
Dedicated to my grandfather.

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Abstract

This research considers one particular element of Koori artistic practice in south-east Australia—the unique and continuing use of the line by the region’s male artists. Line-work is evident in a range of imagery, in various mediums, and throughout different generations. This study reveals the cultural importance and unbroken use of the line through changing social, political and cultural climates. The recognition of a continuing south-east aesthetic is significant, as the region has experienced prolonged colonisation, leading to a fragmentation of visual expressions and lack of art-historical research. In this context, the line represents the continuation of culture and the unbroken lineage of Koori knowledge.

A key contribution to Aboriginal studies is the development of a Wiradjuri-specific research methodology, named here Yindyamarra Winhanganha, which centres on yindyamarra or cultural respect. This methodology underpins the research.

This research is titled *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors*. The Wiradjuri word ‘murruwaygu’ refers to the designs carved onto trees and other cultural material unique to the south-east region: repeating lines, patterned chevrons and concentric squares, diamonds and rhomboids, with the inclusion of an occasional figure. Widely recognised as central to south-east identity, murruwaygu can be seen in artistic practices from pre-contact until today, establishing a clear cultural tradition that has endured massive change. This research charts this constant practice by investigating four distinct periods or generations. Referencing south-east kinship systems, each generation is represented by two artforms or artists. This kinship framework, named here Koori Kinship Theory, is understood as a culturally specific living archiving system and thus provides structure for the research.

Representing Mumala (grandfather) or first generation is pre-contact material—the carved and designed marga (parrying shield) and girran.girran (broad shield). The second or Babiin (father) generation features 19th-century Koori artists William Barak, a Wurundjeri man from the current Melbourne area, and Tommy McRae, from the upper Murray River near the contemporary border of NSW and Victoria. These artists documented their changing worlds with introduced materials like paper, pen and pencil, continuing line-work as a leading visual principle. The third or Wurrumany (son) generation focuses on self-taught senior Wiradjuri mission artists Uncle Roy Kennedy and the late HJ Wedge. Both use painting and printmaking that features line-work to document their life experiences of growing up on missions in NSW under segregation policies. Finally, the Warunarrung (grandson) generation is represented by professional and tertiary-educated contemporary Melbourne-based artists Reko Rennie (Kamilaroi) and Steaphan Paton (Gunai/Monero), who both work with new mediums while continuing line traditions.

Like these Koori artists, this thesis uses the line as its organising principle, both practically and metaphorically, to follow in the footsteps of our ancestors. Focusing on continuity and change, this research provides the first art-historical account of Koori men’s art from pre-contact to today.

Community Advisory Committee statement

We are happy to lend our knowledge, guidance and support to this important research, *Murrurwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors*. The ongoing practice, research and development of south-east Aboriginal culture by our community is vital to ensure the strength of the future generations. We are proud to see this realised.

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Dr Uncle Stan Grant Snr AM

Wiradjuri elder

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Professor Uncle Michael McDaniel

Wiradjuri elder

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Professor Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin AO

Wurundjeri elder

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Finally, and most importantly, I acknowledge nyiwarri, Genevieve O'Callaghan.

List of abbreviations

ABC: Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACT: Australian Capital Territory
AGNSW: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
AIATSIS: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra
AM: Australian Museum, Sydney
ANU: Australian National University, Canberra
BM: British Museum, London
KHT: Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne
MV: Museum Victoria, Melbourne
NAVA: National Association for the Visual Arts
NGA: National Gallery Australia, Canberra
NGV: National Gallery Victoria, Melbourne
NLA: National Library of Australia, Canberra
NMA: National Museum of Australia, Canberra
NSW: New South Wales
PRM: Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford
SLNSW: State Library New South Wales, Sydney
SLV: State Library of Victoria, Melbourne
TAFE: Technical and Further Education
UNSW: University of New South Wales, Sydney
UTS: University of Technology Sydney

Notes to the reader

All Aboriginal language words mentioned in the following pages are spelt according to the respective community or artist's standard language orthography. It should be noted that the terms 'south-east' and 'Koori', along with 'language group' and 'nation', are interchangeable for the purposes of this research. Archaic spelling and terminology, some examples of which are considered unacceptable, remain in quoted texts drawn from historical sources.

Language groups and biographical information are included after the initial mention of the names of Indigenous artists and historical figures. Language groups are included (where known) for Indigenous writers, curators, theorists, historians and cultural leaders, present and historical.

For figure captions, measurements are in centimetres; height precedes width. Culturally sensitive images are reproduced in consultation with the relevant communities. Aligned with the style of the AGNSW, where *Murrurwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors* was exhibited over 2015–2016, artists' details within figure captions in this thesis locate their language group or nation within the regions set out by David R. Horton's (1996) Aboriginal Australia map.

Warning

Members of Aboriginal communities are respectfully advised that several people mentioned in writing or depicted in imagery in this thesis have passed away.